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WILDLIFE:

N.Y. steps away from plan to slaughter mute swans

Colin Sullivan, E&E reporter

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New York regulators yesterday dialed back a plan that would have eliminated wild populations of mute swans to halt their destruction of native plant and animal species.

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) revised its plan for controlling the free-flying, long-necked swans after an outcry from animal activists on a previous proposal that would have meant outright slaughter of the birds.

The updated plan, subject to a 45-day comment period, would allow municipalities to keep swans at local parks as long as certain habitat maintenance standards are met.

It would also seek to study the birds and the effects on their environment rather than killing most of them outright, separating upstate from downstate treatment to look at history, status and management opportunities for how to better minimize damage.

Also to be considered are nonlethal means to reduce mute swan populations, including the oiling of eggs and placement of swans with DEC personnel. The new plan still allows killing of the swans around Lake Ontario, where locals tend to view them as notorious pests.

The mute swans -- which are not mute but rather tend to hiss at other animals and humans -- were introduced into the New York region in the 19th century by an elite class that wanted the birds on its ponds and estates. They have since flourished but have been held responsible for a range of offenses including displacing other birds and harming aquatic vegetation.

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According to the DEC, escaped birds were able to establish feral populations that can pose dangers to aircraft as well as other birds and often appear threatening to humans.

DEC Commissioner Joe Martens said he had been influenced by a number of groups he met with in the lead-up to the new rules, including the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, Ducks Unlimited, the NYS Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the Humane Society of the United States, the NYS Conservation Council, the NYS Invasive Species Advisory Committee and the Agriculture Department's Wildlife Services.

"These organizations displayed a tremendous amount of professionalism in voicing their concerns

while demonstrating a willingness to listen and seek solutions that would be broadly accepted," Martens added. "As a result of this thoughtful public input, the plan is greatly improved."

[Click here](#) to see the revised plan as well as the one it replaces.

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